hasn't had a single morning backache. Sure, it may be psychological; spending so much money on a bed practically compels you to feel better, says Bill Wohlgemuth, Ph.D., a clinical health psychologist at the Duke University Sleep Disorders Center in Durham, North Carolina. "If you got that bed for free, you probably wouldn't like it as much," he says. "But so what, if that's what gets you a great night's sleep."

Indeed, today the demand for high-end mattresses, which start at $1,000, is so strong that a slew of manufacturers are vying to meet it. For $3,000, indulgent sleepers can buy a queen set from the Kingsdown Passions Collection with individually encased, hand-tied coils designed to compensate for the differences in each sleeper's body. Or, for approximately $5,000, you can get a Serta Perfect Night Vitalize bed that features a layer of air cells that, whenever you move, are automatically adjusted by a computer-driven air compressor to consistently maintain the exact amount of support you choose. The pressure can be customized for each person sharing the bed, as well as for three different zones of each body. For a $7,198 list price at Bloomingdale's, you can have Stearns & Foster's most luxurious Golden Elegance set (which features a full-mattress pillow filled with spherical fibers said to cradle your contours better than the traditional rods), covered in woven Belgian damask and finished with 24 karat gold–plated brass corner guards—perfect for impressing anyone who happens to be changing the sheets.

There's no question the popularity of such luxury goods is benefiting from the strong economy. Having moved from negligible sales five years ago, high-end mattresses now account for about 5 percent of the $4-billion-a-year industry. "We can't make them fast enough," says Bo Gustafsson, president of Dux Interiors North America, referring to the company's new top-of-the-line $5,700 queen system. Don Hofmann, a vice president at the Simmons Company in Atlanta, cites other reasons for the interest. "In our high-stress, 24-hour society, beds have suddenly become a luxury item," he explains. "You lie down and you go, 'Wow! As hard as I work, as little as I sleep, this bed is going to make a difference. I'm going to go for it.'"

Andrea Herman, director of the Better Sleep Council, an organization funded by the mattress industry, adds, "Some people will argue comfort is not a luxury, it's a necessity." Doctors are not so sure. Eugene Krauss, M.D., chairman of orthopedic surgery at North Shore University Hospital in Glen Cove, New York, scoffs when asked about pricey bedding. "The whole thing is a bunch of nonsense," he says. "If you don't have a bad back, you can sleep on a park bench. Most reasonably priced mattresses are more than adequate."

Can a great mattress help you live a longer, happier, more productive life?

Adequate? Is that enough? After all, we may be spending approximately one third of our lives in bed. Given how well documented it is that good sleep is an important determinant of good health (one leading researcher goes so far as to call it as influential as diet or exercise), couldn't it be argued that a great mattress might help you live a longer, happier, more productive life?

Unfortunately, science can't tell us much about the correlation between the quality of a mattress and the quality of sleep. To date, researchers have focused almost exclusively on sleep's physiology, why our bodies need it and what within our bodies triggers its many cycles. Experts can confidently relate that the optimal room temperature for slumber is between 60 and 65° F, that steady low noises, such as the whir of a fan or the whoosh of a white-noise machine, help soothe the mind into sleep's unconscious state and that using your bed for anything except sleep or sex—reading, TV, snacking—increases the likelihood of insomnia. But ask what kind of mattress you should look for and even experts shrug. "Frankly, we have almost no data relating sleep to different types of beds," says William C. Dement, M.D., founder of the nation's first sleep clinic at Stanford University, past president of the American Academy of Sleep Medicine and coauthor of *The Promise of Sleep* (Delacorte Press).

So where does that lack of knowledge leave us? Orthopedic surgeons, chiropractors, physical therapists and others involved in ergonomics—the study of comfortable human/machine interaction—may have some answers. "What you want in a mattress is similar to what you want in a chair, something that gently supports your body at all points and keeps the curve in your spine in the same position it's in when you're in a good standing posture," says Elliot Menkowitz, M.D., an orthopedic surgeon in Pottstown, Pennsylvania, who is also the medical director of the National Foundation for Spinal Health, an ergonomic consulting group. "Firm, but not too firm, because *really* firm is actually not good. The mattress can't adjust and preserve your spine's alignment as you shift your position through the night. It won't have the yield to cup your body at points like the neck and the *Continued on page 173*

Anatomy of a Mattress

Innersprings Wires shaped and twisted into coils are the heart of these mattresses, which are the most prevalent on the market.
Coil gauge Thickness of the coils' wire. The smaller the number, the thicker the wire and the firmer the bed.
Padding What encases the coils so you won't feel them. Padding may be made of polyurethane foam, cotton batting, wool, felt or silk. Higher-end mattresses often have a pillow top cushion.
Box spring A layer of coils encased in a frame; it supports the mattress.
Ticking The outermost upholstery layer.
Depth Heavily padded mattresses can be up to 18 inches thick. —*N. A.*

Pillow Talk

Without the right pillow, even the most comfortable mattress won't deliver deep slumber. It should be soft enough to conform to the contours of your head and neck, yet thick enough to support them in a neutral position with no upward or downward tilt. Here's a guide to what's available.

DOWN Soft, breathable, natural fuzz clusters pulled from underneath the goose's breast. (Don't worry, the geese aren't killed.) Down is the most expensive pillow filling available, but also the most pliable and longest-lasting.

FEATHERS A firmer, denser, less expensive filling, feathers are often mixed in with down to cut costs. The fanciest combination pillows have a middle core of goose feathers surrounded by an outer layer of down.

SYNTHETIC DOWN Hypoallergenic, spun polyester microfibers that offer comfort similar to down, at about two thirds the price.

COTTON FILL It offers a medium-firm feel that appeals to those who want an all-natural, animal-free product. Cotton tends to flatten more quickly than other fillings, so these pillows need to be replaced more often.

TEMPERATURE-SMART FOAM A heat-sensitive material that conforms to each sleeper's unique head and neck curves.

LATEX A natural rubber filling of varying levels of firmness that's purported to be antibacterial, antimicrobial and resistant to dust mites, which can cause allergic reactions.

BUCKWHEAT Supposedly lets more air circulate around your head, preventing sweating during sleep. Some sleepers complain the texture is too pebbly.

WATER The Mediflow water-based pillow is essentially an insulated water bag that you fill until it's comfortable. The fluid enables the pillow to respond to head motion during sleep, which can help ease neck pain and improve sleep, a claim supported by a 1997 Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine study. (For details, call 888-763-3435.) —*N. A.*

ARE YOU GETTING ENOUGH?

Contrary to popular belief, a well-rested person should not drop off the minute her head touches the pillow, but should spend 15 minutes or so before entering the Land of Nod. If you fall asleep immediately, you may be sleep-deprived. —*Madeline Johnson*

GETTING-TO-SLEEP TRICKS

When SELF staffers can't sleep, these tricks work for them.

"I watch *Citizen Kane*. I have yet to see it through to the end. It's like knockout drops." **—Elizabeth O'Brien**

"I never check the clock, or I'll just obsess endlessly over the fact that it's 2:08 A.M. and I'm not asleep." **—Sharon Allen**

"I do a relatively easy crossword puzzle, which is like reading an encyclopedia—makes you drowsy almost immediately." **—Joanne Gabriel**

"If I can't sleep I envision a blackboard on which I list all the things that are bothering me. When I'm done I take a fire hose and blast everything off!" **—Jessica Athanasiou**

Sleep Tips

To ensure a good night's rest, the National Sleep Foundation and other sleep authorities suggest the following.

- Avoid caffeine and nicotine in the late afternoon and evening.
- Make sure your sleep environment is cool, dark and quiet.
- Go to bed and get up at the same time every day.
- Don't drink alcohol to "help" you sleep.
- Exercise regularly, but finish the workout at least three hours before bedtime.
- Establish a regular relaxing bedtime routine.
- Associate your bed with sleep. Don't use it to work or watch television.
- If you're having trouble sleeping at night, try to resist napping during the day. —*M. J.*

Resources

ORGANIZATIONS National Sleep Foundation: 202-347-3471, www.sleepfoundation.org; American Sleep Disorders Association: www.asda.org
BOOKS *Power Sleep* by James B. Maas (HarperCollins); *Good Nights: How to Stop Sleep Deprivation, Overcome Insomnia, and Get the Sleep You Need* by Gary Zammit, M.D. (Andrews McNeel); *The Promise of Sleep* by William C. Dement, M.D. (Delacorte Press)
WEB SITES The Sleep Well: www.stanford.edu/~dement; SleepNet: www.sleepnet.com; The Sleep Medicine Home Page: www.cloud9.net/~thorpy —*M. J.*